

INTRODUCTION

For well over a decade, social media has played a major role in the shaping of our society. With the boom of social media interaction in the early 2000s came a “culture of connectivity” (Van Dijck, 2013), where individuals and organizations alike have become heavily reliant upon this vehicle of communication. This reliance upon social media has changed the face of modern life such that it is fast becoming our primary vehicle for connecting with and relaying information to others. Therefore, it is of no surprise that state and local governments have begun to embrace this culture and become heavily reliant on social media as a key means of communication (Ellison and Hardy, 2013; Kavanaugh et al., 2012; Perlman, 2012).

The application of social media in government settings promotes new opportunities for governments to engage their citizens. These opportunities for engagement bring with them innovative ways for governments to reach out to citizens to distribute and market their goods and services. Like the business world, governments are beginning to take advantage of the various platforms of social media to employ strategies that enable them to not only market and distribute services, but also obtain public feedback that allows them to make needed improvements. Much like the private sector, the public sector is quickly recognizing the importance of engaging consumers on a personal basis as they can more effectively target services to the citizenry’s needs and in some instances even provide them more efficiently to reduce costs (Howard, 2012; Kingsley et al., 2012).

This begs the question first presented by Perlman (2012), what are state and local governments doing regarding the “best transformational practices” of social media? In other words, what exactly are they doing to promote social media’s innovative use? We expand this question by asking, how can practitioners innovatively use social media in their efforts to engage the public and address community problems around public service delivery? To address this overarching question, this article presents a case study about assessing and improving social media use for community policing in one urban Southwestern police department. Here, we observe the Austin Police Department’s (APD) utilization of social media by using the community policing practical ideals of forging community partnerships and problem solving. We use these ideals borrowed from the *Community Policing – Self Assessment Tool* to assess this organization’s policies through the lens of the effective usage of social media.

After briefly overviewing the APD as a setting for analysis, this article proceeds with a brief discussion of the opportunities and challenges of social media use in local government service delivery. It continues by developing a practical ideal model for assessing social media use in APD policies and practices

for community policing. It then applies this model to APD and presents relevant results. Finally, we discuss consequential lessons from this case that provide useful implications for municipal social media applications around public engagement.

THE SETTING OF THE AUSTIN POLICE DEPARTMENT

The Austin Police Department provides an interesting backdrop for examining local government use of social media in the delivery of public services for two reasons. First, APD serves the diversified population of the eleventh largest city in the United States. Austin being one of the fastest growing cities requires proactive and creative public service delivery to fully serve the demands of its citizenry. The increasing demands of its diverse population presents challenges that are common to growing urban communities (e.g. crime, traffic and housing). This scenario provides an opportunity to obtain a glimpse of how one jurisdiction in particular employs these technologies in the face of these common community challenges.

Second, the City of Austin itself fosters a culture that encourages open government through the use of information technology to inform citizens regarding its performance. For example, the Office of the City Manager provides accessible information that allows citizens to obtain data regarding the city's performance through the use of an interactive performance management dashboard. APD as one of this city's departments, has embraced this culture by implementing data driven and intelligence led strategies for community policing. These practices provide a unique opportunity to examine the execution of social media within local public sector activities. Specifically, we are able to observe the implementation of this department's policies and procedures regarding the use of social media in its execution of community policing.

THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND PUBLIC SERVICE DELIVERY

An emergence of research on the effective use of social media finds itself producing interest in how state and local governments use this medium to enhance their services. In particular, Perlman (2012) notes that governments have increasingly used social media to connect users in both social and market exchanges. This use of social media is increasingly used by state and local jurisdictions to communicate, direct and coordinate service delivery and its related activities (Perlman, 2012). Recent studies support this assertion and demonstrate that not only have local governments enhanced their services by way

of social media, but they have done so in their efforts to engage communities while delivering vital public services.

As an example, Sutton, Palen and Shklovski (2008) demonstrated how local governments of the Southern California area relied on the public's use of social media during the 2007 wildfires. Here, they demonstrated how social media was effectively used to enhance the emergency management efforts of state and local governments. Another example falls within the realm of traffic control. In this instance, Kavanaugh et al. (2012) pointed out how citizens in Arlington County, Virginia heavily used social media as a mechanism to relay concerns about traffic conditions to the local government. Bendor, Lyons and Robinson (2012) provided a unique example of government social media usage when they demonstrated how The City of Vancouver, British Columbia used Facebook to engage the public in its transportation planning efforts. Among other things, they demonstrated how social media can elevate citizen participation as well as give officials clues as to the sentiment of the general public.

Local governments have made great use of social media in the area of community policing. Crump's (2011) examination of social media usage among UK police forces demonstrated how these law enforcement agencies effectively used Twitter to augment existing means of communication efforts with the public. Likewise, Lieberman, Koetzle and Sakiyama (2013) demonstrated how law enforcement agencies across the U.S. are increasingly using social media as a method of communication. Their analysis of the content patterns of police ran Facebook pages indicated that agencies with more frequent postings typically used this platform as a means to relay crime-related messages. An example of this type of communicating involves the Boston Police Department using social media during the Boston Marathon bombings in 2013. During this event, the Boston Police Department took advantage of the use of Twitter to keep the public informed about the status of the investigation, as well as to mitigate the existence of any inaccurate or misleading information (Davis, Alves and Sklansky, 2014).

CHALLENGES IN CITIZEN-GOVERNMENT INTERACTIONS IN THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Challenges in Communicating with the Public

While governments have taken strides in their efforts to engage citizens by way of social media, these efforts have not been immune to certain challenges. One key challenge comes from the authoritative hierarchical mode that governments frequently use to communicate. Specifically, governments often use an asynchronous one-to-many citizen-government Internet interaction that over promotes a power-over perspective (speaking-from power) as opposed to the

power-with (speaking-to power) perspective (Farmer 2003; Hand and Ching 2011). While “speaking-from power” and “speaking-to power” are two sides of the same power-dynamic relationship, public administrators often bring an imbalance in communication by defaulting to the more authoritative side of this coin (Farmer 2003). Using Farmer’s perspectives of communication, Hand and Ching presented evidence supporting this notion in their examination of local governments’ use of social media for citizen-government interaction. Here, their observation of a selection of cities from the Phoenix, Arizona metro area revealed them to use the authoritative “speaking-from power” stance of communicating more often than the “speaking-to power” of communication.

Mergel (2013) furthered this argument by providing a framework that defines various mechanisms of social media interactions as either “push,” “pull” or “networking” strategies. “Push” strategies merely provide authoritative representation where governments broadcast information with no opportunities for recipient interaction. “Pull” strategies call for more engaging methods and allows citizens to provide feedback and user-created contributions. Finally, “networking” strategies extend “pull” strategies and call for open dialogue and extensive discussions among citizens. Mossberger, Wu and Crawford (2013) used this framework to examine social media use among a sample of 75 municipalities. A content analysis of various municipal government websites revealed that the majority of the observed cities defaulted more towards “push” strategies, while some used “pull” and “networking” methods to promote some two-way engagement. Yet, their work highlighted a lack of extensive citizen participation, which brought to light the gap between citizens voicing their demands and government’s responsiveness to address those demands. As Ellison and Hardey (2013) pointed out, local governments often miss opportunities to effectively use social media to enhance service provision by using it simply as a means to “push” information to residents. Rather than using social media to formulate a two-way communication structure, the literature suggests that localities often use these tools to merely broadcast information to consumers.

Kingsley et al. (2012) provided several points that informed governments on how to overcome this challenge by taking certain precautions in their implementation of social media. Here, they contended that social media use by governments can and should be interactive rather than authoritative, personal rather than institutional, and narrowcast through networks rather than broadcast. An analysis of European local governments conducted by Bonsón et al. (2012) added to this with examples of how social media could be effectively implemented to increase government’s reach with little cost. They also demonstrated how localities were using this medium to increase government transparency and promote real corporate dialogue. In sum, the effective use of social media can be advantageous for local governments to overcome the

problems of distance and disengagement from their communities (Howard, 2012). However, organizations must take thoughtful approaches if they are to avoid the communication challenges as outlined above.

Challenges in the Institutional Adoption of Technologies

Another key challenge that governments face in social media use is the lack of formal and institutionalized adoption of these communication tools. Specifically, the adoption of these technologies can be unorganized and unstructured, leading to policy inconsistencies in the implementation and application of these tools (Mergel and Bretschneider, 2013). Mergel and Bretschneider (2013) presented how organizations typically overcome this challenge within the adoption process by applying a three-staged framework based upon a general theory of technology adoption to government use of social media. They indicated that organizations first go through an intrapreneurship and experimentation stage. Within this stage new social media technologies are diffused throughout organizations informally by individuals experienced with these technologies. A great deal of experimentation occurs as individuals attempt to apply these technologies for themselves and small groups around them (Mergel and Bretschneider, 2013). While this approach expands the domain of use for new technologies, they argued that this also brings great tension caused by the blurring of professional and personal norms of conduct. The second stage involves bringing order from chaos. Here, they mentioned that adopters implement different versions of the technologies, and in some cases multiple versions. However, tensions related to information accuracy, privacy and ownership are likely to bring forth the need for organizations to implement standardization protocols and policy procedures. The final stage involves institutionalization, where variation has been removed across the organization as it implements a new technology. Even though new elements are constantly being introduced and tested, Mergel and Bretschneider stated that organizations are buffered from inconsistencies and weaknesses with standards, rules and processes that provide protocols around the management of actions and resources.

A PRACTICAL MODEL FOR COMMUNITY POLICING

To examine the Austin Police Department's practices in the utilization of social media, we borrow from a concept proposed by Shields and Rangarajan (2013) to develop a model assessment tool that presents a practical ideal type instrument adapted for law enforcement's use of social media. The term "practical" refers to the "organic nature of the model" and that the components "are developed for their usefulness" (Shields and Rangarajan, 2013, 162). "Ideal" is used to indicate

that it is not fixed and subject to revision. Practical ideal types provide “benchmarks” that organizations can use to understand and improve the reality of what is being studied (Shields and Rangarajan, 2013). We use this model to assess the Austin Police Department in its community policing efforts considering the best transformational practices of social media utilization.

The Two Tenets of Trust in Community Policing

The effective implementation of community policing involves the two tenets of building trust, which are forming partnerships with diverse interest groups embedded within the community and proactively seeking to solve community problems. A department’s success in forming community partnerships and solving local problems relies on the effective management of its organization. Using this philosophy, the U.S. Department of Justice (USDOJ) provides a standardized self-assessment tool for law enforcement organizations to objectively and comprehensively assesses their community policing efforts. This assessment tool consists of an anonymous survey conducted by the USDOJ and administered to sworn officers across the United States. This tool is used to improve and sustain useful practices of community policing. This assessment tool known as the *Community Policing – Self Assessment Tool (CP-SAT)* provides a framework for community policing based upon three primary tenets which are community policing, problem solving and organizational transformation. For the purposes and nature of this study, we turn our attention to two of these tenets, community partnerships and problem solving. With these two tenets in mind, this model develops two practical ideals of social media use in community policing: *Building Community Partnerships through Social Media* and *Community Problem Solving through Social Media*. The following highlight how these two tenets develop our practical ideals by outlining category areas of assessment that are used to examine APD’s use of social media.

Tenet 1: Building Community Partnerships

Regarding the first ideal, the USDOJ (2014) outlines four ways law enforcement agencies should partner with their communities. We use these four methods of community partnerships to develop the four categories used to assess the APD’s efforts of forming partnerships with its local community. These categories include:

- General Engagement with the Public – By keeping the public informed about law enforcement activities by way of social media, they are engaging audiences that they normally would not reach. In using such social media technology, law enforcement can directly interact with

organizations and individuals within the community. This type of communication empowers the public by undoing the “us versus them” mentality that stifles effective community policing, which provides opportunities for non-adversarial interactions, leading to greater community engagement (Lieberman, Koetzle and Sakiyama, 2013). Here, agencies are seen as interactively engaging with the public through means of discourse.

- Community Organization and Local Business Partnerships – Partnering with organizations through social media can surpass the rigidity and limitations of traditional meetings and enable more frequent contact. Online communicating can provide for more instances of repeated interactions with citizens, businesses and organizations that have a great interest in the welfare of the community (Perkins and Newman, 2012).
- Government Partnerships (Non-Law Enforcement) – Successful law enforcement organizations interact with numerous non-law enforcement government organizations that have communal interests and operate within their community. This type of law enforcement interaction is beneficial in building productive relationships that can assist with crime prevention and information dissemination (Peak, 2013). The use of social media in these interactions can be key to law enforcement in bridging information gaps with other government agencies.
- Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice System Partnerships – Law enforcement organizations are successful when they act collectively with other law enforcement agencies (USDOJ, 2014). Online communicating with other policing organizations has the potential to increase their ability to distribute and receive information, allow for a better understanding of trends and increase their situational awareness (Peak, 2013).

Tenet 2: Community Problem Solving

For the second practical ideal of community policing, the USDOJ (2013) encourages law enforcement organizations to adopt the SARA (Scanning, Analysis, Response and Assessment) Model of problem solving. This framework for problem solving is the standard model used by law enforcement agencies and is recommended as a key method for community problem solving by the USDOJ. This model has essentially become the premier industry standard in community policing internationally (Sidebottom and Tilley, 2011; Alpert, Flynn, and Piquero, 2001). Therefore, we use this common standard as a method of examining APD’s efforts of community problem solving. Each component of the SARA Model integrates different segments of the community, strengthens partnerships and

assists in resolving community issues. Incorporating social media into the SARA Model entails:

- Scanning – Using social media to facilitate the identification of problems that are of concern to the public.
- Analysis – Law enforcement effectively leveraging social media to provide insight into the nature of the problem, why it is occurring, what is known about it and who the effective stakeholders are that can effectively assist in rectifying the problem.
- Response – Law enforcement agencies can integrate social media into their plans to intervene in problem areas.
- Assessment – Effective engagement with the community can provide the proper feedback needed to determine whether the outcome was achieved in addressing the problem.

ANALYSIS OF THE AUSTIN POLICE DEPARTMENT’S SOCIAL MEDIA USE

To examine the Austin Police Department’s use of social media within the context of community policing, we conducted a series of content analyses of its Facebook postings and Twitter activity along with semi-structured interviews with key staff. We assessed this department through the lens of the best transformational practices of social media using the developed practical ideal type framework. Using the four ideal categories of *Building Community Partnerships through Social Media*, our content analysis assesses how APD integrates the use of social media with *general engagement with the public*, *community organization and local business partnerships*, *government partnerships (non-Law enforcement)*, and *law enforcement and criminal justice system partnerships*. For our content analysis, we observe the percent of Facebook and Twitter activity between the periods of April and June of 2015. Table 1 summarizes our measures for APD’s use of social media as assessed by the four ideal type categories of community partnerships.

Table 1 Community Partnerships: Social Media by Practical Ideal Category

Types of partnerships	Social Media Measures
1. Law enforcement and Criminal Justice system partners	Social Media Analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook (percent of posts and likes containing interactions with law enforcement ^a and related agencies ^b). • Twitter (percent of tweets and feeds followed containing interactions with law enforcement ^a and related agencies ^b).
2. Government Partnerships (Non -Law Enforcement)	Social Media Analysis

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook (percent of posts and likes with content exhibiting interactions with other governments ^c). • Twitter (percent of tweets and feeds followed with content exhibiting interactions with other governments ^c).
3. Community Organizations and Local Business Partnerships	<p>Social Media Analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook (percent of posts and likes with content exhibiting interactions with non-profit community-based organizations ^d and Business Organizations ^e). • Twitter (percent of tweets and feeds followed with content exhibiting interactions with non-profit community-based organizations ^d and Business Organizations ^e).
4. General Engagement with the Public	<p>Social Media Analysis</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook (percent of posts and likes with content exhibiting interactions with local media and individuals in the community ^f). • Facebook (percent of posts that contain content exhibiting direct interaction with individuals in the community). • Twitter (percent of tweets and feeds followed with content exhibiting interactions with local media and individuals in the community ^f). • Twitter (percent of tweets that contain content exhibiting direct interaction with individuals in the community).
	<p>a Other law enforcement organizations consist of federal, state, county, local, special jurisdiction, school natural resources, transit and tribal law enforcement agencies that operate in the community</p> <p>b Other components of the criminal justice system include courts, corrections and other organizations in the judicial branch of government.</p> <p>c Other government agencies include any other governmental entity in the executive or legislative branch of government. Examples include public works departments, health and human service agencies, child support services and school districts.</p> <p>d Non-profit/community-based organizations is defined as “advocacy and community-based organizations that provide services to the community and advocate on its behalf. These groups can be powerful partners and often work with or are composed of individuals who share common interests and can include such entities as victims’ groups, service clubs, support groups, issue groups, advocacy groups, community development corporations, and the faith community” (USDOJ 2014, 3). It may also include other hyper-local community-based groups of varying levels of organization such as civic groups, ethnic groups and neighborhood watch associations.</p> <p>e Law enforcement interaction with businesses operating in the community includes both private corporations and business led civic events.</p>

	f Individuals in the community are seen as persons who live, work or otherwise have an interest in the community to include volunteers, activists, formal and informal community leaders, residents, visitors, tourists and commuters.
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To evaluate the practical ideal type of *Community Problem Solving through Social Media*, we placed an emphasis on the ideal practices based upon the SARA Model of problem solving for community policing. This ideal type was assessed through the four elements of this model, which are *scanning*, *analysis*, *responding* and *assessment*. For this portion of our study we use a descriptive research approach based upon semi-structured interviews of two representatives of APD's Public Information Office (a Public Information Office supervisor and a Public Information Office specialist) to provide understanding regarding the internal operations and uses of social media within the APD. The main component of this portion of the study was also supported with a review of documentation consisting of the overall guidelines on the use of social media for the City of Austin.

Application of the Social Media to Build Community Partnerships – Push/Pull Activities

We examine APD's use of social media to build community partnerships by examining its Facebook and Twitter activity. A descriptive analysis of the social media activity by total and frequency of activity is outlined in Table 2. Within this table, we coded the social media platform use by activity type. For Facebook, activities were coded as either "Posts" or "Pages Liked." For Twitter, activities were coded as either "Tweets" or "Feeds Followed." Within this table, we also attempted to observe whether activities involved "push" versus "pull" strategies of communication. To achieve this, we simply denoted "Posts" and "Tweets" as "push" strategies, while "Pages Liked" and "Feeds Followed" were deemed as "pull" strategies. Because this table provides only a descriptive look at the frequency of Tweets, posts, pages liked and feeds followed, this table does not look deeper at the types of engagement, which would include the category of "networking" strategies. For the purposes of this case, the observed totals for APD Facebook and Twitter activity were categorized by practical ideal type. At face value, the tables suggested that *general engagement with the public* had the highest occurrence of social media activity. Meanwhile, both the categories involving the development of partnerships with other law enforcement and non-law enforcement government agencies had the least social media activity. APD's use of social media to forge partnerships with community organizations and local business was shown to be second.

Table 2 Building Community Partnerships: Quantities of APD Social Media Activity

Types of Partnerships	Platform	Activity Type	Strategy	Total Activity	Activity Frequency
Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice System Partnerships	Facebook	Posts	Push	4	4%
		Pages Liked	Pull	10	48%
	Twitter	Tweets	Push	14	4%
		Feeds Followed	Pull	50	24%
Government Partnerships (Non-Law Enforcement)	Facebook	Posts	Push	8	8%
		Pages Liked	Pull	1	5%
	Twitter	Tweets	Push	31	9%
		Feeds Followed	Pull	36	17%
Community Organization and Local Business Partnerships	Facebook	Posts	Push	11	10%
		Pages Liked	Pull	8	38%
	Twitter	Tweets	Push	46	13%
		Feeds Followed	Pull	24	11%
General Engagement with the Public	Facebook	Posts	Push	82	78%
		Pages Liked	Pull	2	9%
	Twitter	Tweets	Push	266	74%
		Feeds Followed	Pull	100	48%
N = 693	Facebook (n = 126)	Posts	105	Push = 462	Push = 67%
		Pages Liked	21		
	Twitter (n = 567)	Tweets	357	Pull = 231	Pull = 33%
		Feeds Followed	210		

While the totals provided a broad picture of how APD's social media activity fell among categories, the frequency of activity provided a closer look that detailed the level of activity by category. Here, we can see which categories relied on what type of social media the most. While the totals revealed that over all the strongest use of social media is for general engagement to the public, a look at the individual social media activities provided a slightly different perspective. Though Facebook posts and tweets by APD consisted of the majority of social media activity, the majority of pages "Liked" fell within the practical ideal category of *law enforcement and criminal justice system partnerships*. This finding suggests that APD's social media interactions with other law enforcement agencies puts them in the role of receiving information from others. However, when dealing with the public, APD's social media interaction embraced more of the "push" philosophy to broadcast information as opposed to using "pull" strategies to receive information. As indicated in Table 2, "push" strategies consisted of roughly 67 percent of the observed activities.

APD's Facebook Interactions

Table 3 provides a closer look at APD's Facebook activities by looking at specific types of interactions. A closer look at individual content allows us to discern whether "pull" strategies extended into "networking" strategies. This table breaks down various Facebook interactions by the types of strategies used to engage other agencies and the public. For interactions with other agencies, roughly 52% of the 23 agency social media engagements consisted of "networking." Meanwhile, 48% of social media interactions with other agencies consisted of some type of "pull" strategy. For interaction with the public, the majority communications involved some type of "push" strategy. Here, 71% of the 103 public communication activities involved "pushing" information out to the public. This suggests that APD's primary use of Facebook was simply to disseminate information as opposed to engaging the public through interactive means of communication. Specifically, it appears that in its efforts to use Facebook to build partnerships within the community it was weak in the area of *general engagement with the public* due to the lack of interactive engagement.

Table 3 Building Community Partnerships: Quantities of Facebook Activity

Agency Interaction (Law Enforcement and Non-Law Enforcement)				
	Strategy	Count	Overall %	Category %
Posts containing content exhibiting interaction with other Austin serving law enforcement agencies	Networking	4	3%	17%
Pages liked belonging to other Austin serving law enforcement agencies	Pull	10	8%	43%
Posts containing content exhibiting interaction with other agencies of the criminal justice system	Networking	0	0%	0%
Pages liked belonging to other agencies of the criminal justice system	Pull	0	0%	0%
Posts containing content exhibiting interaction with other government agencies	Networking	8	6%	35%
Pages liked belonging to other government agencies	Pull	1	1%	5%
Total Agency Interactions		23		100%
Public Interaction (General Public and Community Organizations)				
Posts containing content exhibiting interaction with nonprofit/community based agency	Networking	7	6%	7%
Pages liked belonging to nonprofit/community based organization	Pull	8	6%	8%
Posts containing content exhibiting interaction with local businesses	Networking	5	4%	5%
Pages liked belonging to local businesses	Pull	0	0%	0%
Posts containing content exhibiting interaction with the public through local media	Networking	4	3%	4%
Pages liked belonging to local media	Pull	0	0%	0%
Posts containing content exhibiting direct interaction with individuals	Networking	4	3%	4%
Pages liked belonging to individuals within the community	Pull	2	2%	2%
Posts that disseminate public safety messages public relations information or services to the public	Push	73	58%	71%
Total Public Interactions		103		100%
Overall Facebook Activity		126	100%	

APD's Twitter Interactions

Table 4 provides a breakdown of social media activity by interactions using Twitter. These Twitter interactions are examined between agency and public interactions and by the type of strategy used. As in Table 3, Table 4 provides a closer look at activity by analyzing the specific content within tweets. Here, we are able to determine whether “pull” strategies are extended into “networking” strategies. For agency interactions, this table shows that APD primarily networked with other agencies with 52% of the 131 engagements involving “networking” methods. Meanwhile engagement with the public primarily consisted of “push” strategies. Likewise, “push” strategies also made up the majority of communicating activities between both agency and public interaction categories using Twitter. Approximately, 55% of all 567 analyzed tweets were deemed as “push” strategies of communication. This suggests that APD's use of Twitter served primarily as a means of broadcasting information out to the public rather than engaging in two-way communication methods. While the table shows signs of APD using Twitter to forge agency to agency partnerships, little was shown that suggests the use of this platform to forge community partnerships or engage in any kind of meaningful discourse. Consistent with Table 3, APD's Twitter activities lacked in the area of *general engagement with the public* due to its unilateral means of communication.

Table 4 Building Community Partnerships: Quantities of Twitter Activity

Agency Interaction (Law Enforcement and Non-Law Enforcement)				
	Strategy	Count	Overall %	Category %
Tweets containing content exhibiting interaction with other Austin serving law enforcement agencies	Networkin g	13	2%	17%
Feeds followed belonging to other Austin serving law enforcement agencies	Pull	46	8%	43%
Tweets containing content exhibiting interaction with other agencies of the criminal justice system	Networkin g	1	0%	0%
Feeds followed belonging to other agencies of the criminal justice system	Pull	4	1%	0%
Tweets containing content exhibiting interaction with other government agencies	Networkin g	31	5%	35%
Feeds followed belonging to other government agencies	Pull	36	6%	5%
Total Agency Interactions		131		100%
Public Interaction (General Public and Community Organizations)				
Tweets containing content exhibiting interaction with nonprofit/community based agency	Networkin g	46	8%	11%
Feeds followed belonging to nonprofit/community based organization	Pull	16	3%	4%
Tweets containing content exhibiting interaction with local businesses	Networkin g	0	0%	0%
Feeds followed belonging to local businesses	Pull	8	1%	2%
Tweets containing content exhibiting interaction with the public through local media	Networkin g	21	4%	5%
Feeds followed belonging to local media	Pull	85	15%	19%
Tweets containing content exhibiting direct interaction with individuals	Networkin g	7	1%	2%
Feeds followed belonging to individuals within the community	Pull	15	3%	3%
Tweets that disseminating public safety messages public relations information or services to the public	Push	238	42%	55%
Total Public Interactions		436		100%
Overall Twitter Activity		567	100%	

AUSTIN POLICE DEPARTMENT'S APPLICATION OF PROBLEM SOLVING THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

Our assessment of the application of the practical ideal model in the area of problem solving provides a descriptive approach to examine APD's use of social media through the four components of the SARA Model of Problem Solving. For this portion of our study, we examined agency documents and conducted semi-structured interviews in order to assess the internal procedures of this agency in light of its use of social media. Here, we assessed APD's use of social media across the four major areas of the SARA Model: scanning, analysis, response and assessment.

Scanning and the Use of Social Media

First, we examined the City of Austin's *Social Media Guidelines* to assess the internal procedures for official social media postings regarding law enforcement responses. This document, while not specific to the APD, does relate to and guide all City of Austin social media operations. In our assessment, we found no formal written procedures that specifically pertained to law enforcement responses. However, an interview with an APD Public Information Office (PIO) supervisor did reveal that APD uses social media to determine the nature and scope of identified problems that affect the community. This supervisor indicated that messages or posts received through social media that comment on problems are directed to the district representative (a police officer that serves as a community liaison for a city police district or region). APD's application of problem solving requires the personal monitoring of social media accounts. With the analysis of messages received through social media, the department determines the best method for resolution.

The PIO supervisor indicated that APD has plans to implement mechanisms in the future that will allow them to better use social media to prioritize problems. One such implementation will be the use of the *ArchiveSocial* system. This system is a social media archiving service designed for government agencies that allows them to retain and maintain information as it is generated through various platforms of social media. One key feature that APD found within this technology is that it utilizes algorithms to alert social media account managers of inappropriate content on pages. This type of system can allow APD to quickly delete offensive material posted to a page. Additionally, this system has the capacity to measure the overall sentiments of its users on a page. The PIO revealed that APD foresees the use of this technology as possibly bringing consistency in monitoring information generated across social media accounts.

Analyzing and the Use of Social Media

APD's use of social media to analyze problems is an evolving process. When asked about the use of social media regarding this component, the PIO supervisor indicated that APD is currently exploring ways to use social media and its related technologies to better understand problems that directly affect the community. The future use of *ArchiveSocial* is an example of this. As this technology will allow APD to assess the public's general sentiment, the department sees the potential for using this tool to analyze problems affecting the community. Another feature that APD deemed useful for this technology is that it will enable APD to track its social media activity in a way that allows it to comply with public records laws and information retention requirements as mandated by its state.

Currently, the department uses social media to assist with analyzing community issues and problems. The concept here is based upon providing awareness and monitor citizens' responses. The department uses social media to market and promote certain campaigns in order to obtain the public's feedback. Here citizens are made aware of a given issue or problem and are informed about what the department is doing. With this method, citizens' feedback allows them to gauge citizens' sentiment of a given issue, problem or campaign and respond accordingly.

Responding and the Use of Social Media

When asked about the use of social media in responding to problems, the PIO supervisor revealed that this method of communication has been useful in responses to different situations. As with the component of analyzing, the use of citizens' feedback is deemed as highly important in formulating a response to community problems. Feedback from the public via social media is vital in allowing APD to employ corrective actions in various situations. However, responding to problems not only comes in the form to responding to citizens' feedback, but it can also include addressing problems in order to maintain positive public relations and relaying accurate information in chaotic situations. For example, a well-known incident in the Austin area occurred in 2015 when a viral video depicted a mounted patrol officer grabbing a person's mobile phone outside of a local bar. The PIO recognized that this video went viral and quickly formulated a response via social media to mitigate any uninformed perceptions or misinformation that may have occurred prior to the department implementing a full investigation. Under the practical ideal type model, this serves as an example of how APD uses social media in its efforts to enhance its response to community problems.

Another way that APD integrates social media with the SARA Model component of responding is by using this medium to reach out to unknown individuals whom the department otherwise would have had no way to connect with. An example of this is when APD used social media to return lost property to an owner during a burglary investigation. APD officers discovered a USB drive at a crime scene containing an individual's personal files, yet they had no information identifying the owner. APD shared an image of the drive and some related information pertaining to it on social media and within an hour the owner of the USB drive contacted APD to claim the item.

Assessment and the Use of Social Media

We examined *The Austin Police Department's Policy Manual* to observe whether the department implemented policies and procedures that require the regular evaluation of its use of social media in order to improve community problem solving. Designated sections relating to departmental social media policies existed, but none were found that were specific to community relations or assessing community issues. However, when asked about this area of social media usage, the PIO supervisor indicated that the police department utilizes social media to determine if responses to community problems were effective. Within this effort, the department uses social media to assess the "temperature" of the community or what the community attitudes are regarding APD's response to a given issue. Here, personnel often conduct a cursory scan of social media posts and replies for content regarding the public's sentiment around agency responses.

APD's Institutional Adoption of Social Media

Across various areas of the SARA Model, APD demonstrated commitments to both fiscal and institutional investments in the use of social media for problem solving. From a financial standpoint, APD showed its willingness to make monetary investments in newer technologies such as *ArchiveSocial* to assist with the implementation of social media in its problem solving efforts. This specific subscription-based service requires a fiscal commitment exceeding \$7,000 annually. APD's willingness to make such a budgetary commitment spoke to its level of buy-in for trying new social media technologies. Although this annual amount may seem relatively small as compared to other technologies that can span into the millions of dollars, this small investment still requires the city's commitment of the public funds, which in turn requires accountability towards the public trust.

From an institutional standpoint, it was demonstrated that the agency is willing to subject itself to policy and organizational changes as it undergoes the

three stages of social media technology adoption (Mergel and Bretschneider, 2013). For example, APD's willingness to invest in *ArchiveSocial* illustrated that it is currently working through the first stage of this adoption cycle as it undergoes experimentation with newer technologies. This was most evident in APD's execution within the scanning and analysis areas of the SARA Model. Here, this agency has an active strategy involving the future experimentation of a newer technology.

Signs of the second stage, which involves bringing order to chaos, were also exhibited throughout APD's execution of the SARA Model. This was brought forth in the PIO supervisor's acknowledgement of APD's need to experiment with newer technologies such as *ArchiveSocial* to bring consistency around records retention and content monitoring and tracking. To date, no technology has been implemented that brings consistency in a way that allows APD to consistently deal with public records and information generated within social media platforms. This lack of technological uniformity can potentially lead to tensions around information accuracy, retention and ownership (Mergel and Bretschneider, 2013).

There was, however, evidence that APD is attempting to enter into the third stage of institutionalization around policy procedures and protocols. This was apparent within their scanning and assessment efforts of the SARA Model. The implementation of the City of Austin's *Social Media Guidelines* is one example of APD's and the overall city's investment in the institutionalization of procedures around social media technology. Likewise, protocols specific to APD were found within the department's policy manual that demonstrated this agency's efforts of conformity around social media services. As mentioned by Mergel and Bretschneider (2013), institutionalized policies such as these can buffer APD from inconsistencies and weaknesses with standards, rules and procedures. These policy manuals also provided protocols that enable APD to manage fiscal and personnel resources in a way that allows them to invest in newer types of social media technologies. However, further investments in policy protocols are warranted in order to bring this agency closer to fully institutionalizing social media adoption.

LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE INTEGRATION OF SOCIAL MEDIA

This case provides an examination of the use of social media in the implementation of community policing in the Austin Police Department. In essence, we analyzed the transformational practices of this department to promote the innovative use of social media in governance (Perlman, 2012). Through the development of a practical ideal type model we assessed this department through the lens of two ideal "best practices" for community policing. First, we assessed

its application of social media within the area of forging community partnerships. Second, we assessed its use of social media in the execution of problem solving in policing as defined by the U. S. Department of Justice. Given our assessment of APDs use of social media, we provide several lessons and recommendations that other government agencies (law enforcement and non-law enforcement) can obtain from this case.

Lessons

Our assessment revealed that APD heavily relies on social media to produce information to be relayed to the public. The majority of its social media activity by way of Facebook and Twitter involved providing information on a wide scale basis to the broader community. This pattern of social media use was found across both the major practical ideals of forging community partnerships and addressing community problems. However, the majority of APD's strategies around public communication emphasized mostly efforts of "pushing" information out to the public as opposed to "pulling" or "networking" in a more engaging manner. Meanwhile, this agency has made some attempts to implement an organized and thoughtful approach to the adoption and implementation of social media technology within its organizational practices. These key takeaways produce four important lessons that can be derived from the illustrations demonstrated in this case:

- Social media can potentially be useful for mass communication: As gleaned from APD's use of "pushing" strategies, social media can potentially be an effective way to quickly distribute information to the public. In community policing, this is key as law enforcement agencies can easily use this tool as a way to provide vital public service information to the community. Integrating social media with traditional news and press coverage can greatly enhance an agency's information presence (Kingsley et al., 2012). Likewise, the advantages of certain social media technologies can also greatly enhance an agency's presence on social media. For example, the "re-tweeting" capabilities of Twitter can exponentially increase the reach of an organization.
- Social media can potentially be useful in forging inter-agency partnerships: This case illustrated how APD uses social media to endorse and relay messages on behalf of other organizations. This illustrates an example of how organizations can work together through social media to endorse and maintain consistency in each other's messages. If citizens see that their home law enforcement agency supports other law enforcement agencies, then that can potentially promote trust within those secondary agencies. This practice is prevalent within the private sector as private

firms often partner to endorse each other in order to garner additional business. This manner of collective action through social media among local agencies can enhance the reach of each agency, as well as allows partners to assist in enhancing their presence.

- Social media can potentially be useful in analyzing and addressing community problems: This case provides an example of how social media can be key in scanning the environment for problems and analyzing in order to solve those problems. Available technology can be useful in assisting organizations in finding and resolving issues in the community. In some instances, social media can be key in mitigating potential problems and avoiding future crises.
- The adoption and implementation of social media should be approached in an organized and thoughtful manner: The current case provided examples of how APD has made some efforts to institutionalize social media technologies and protocols within its organization. Using the three stages of technology adoption, agencies should make efforts to bring institutional consistencies that not only buffer them from policy problems, but also enables them to effectively manage the use of fiscal and personnel resources.

Recommendations

APD's integration of social media highlights common practices in law enforcement as they make efforts to enhance their community policing endeavors (Lieberman, Koetzle and Sakiyama, 2013; Crump, 2011). Yet, the findings and trends illustrated in the current case begs several key points that can assist managers in their efforts for integrating social media into their operations. Specifically, the case revealed that APD primarily defaulted to the more authoritative "speaking-from" power of communication as opposed to the more engaging "speaking-to" mode (Farmer 2003). Doing this foregoes opportunities for agencies to allow for balanced communication methods that empower the citizenry with thoughtful public engagement. We elaborate this theme with the following key recommendations:

- Connect with your audience: In the current case, we found that much of APD's community interactions involved the "pushing" out of information to the general public. While this is vital, organizations must remember to open up opportunities for citizen dialogue and feedback. This builds citizens' trust and enhances their participation through "speaking-to" modes of public engagement. Agencies should use social media to formulate two-way communication structures through "pulling" and

“networking” strategies as opposed to simply “pushing” information out to the public. This opens opportunities to forge real community partnerships.

- Narrow your communication efforts for other organizations: The current case revealed how local agencies can often miss opportunities to effectively engage community organizations and local businesses. As asserted by Kingsley et al. (2012), social media efforts should be narrowcast as opposed to broadcast. This means agencies should emphasize building networks around the special interests of these organizations. An interactive relationship based upon symmetry should be based upon the right messages for these networks.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Our assessment of APD’s community policing considering the practical ideal type model highlighted how this agency integrates the use of social media. Specifically, this investigation examines the Austin Police Department’s efforts to employ the use of social media to forge partnerships and address problems in the community. This assessment produced several lessons and recommendations for practitioners to use in their efforts to integrate social media into their organizational practices. Overall, the case indicated that APD has made strong efforts to use social media in some areas, while they are still developing in others. Specifically, this agency was strong when it came to forging partnerships with other agencies but was weaker in its efforts to forge partnerships with the community. This specific case outcome is consistent with the empirical findings of Mossberger et al. (2013) in that APD tended to default more towards “push” strategies for public communication. Although APD has made efforts to connect with the public at large, its less engaging approach of “pushing” information forgoes opportunities to build more two-way engaging relationships (Ellison and Hardey 2013). Instead of simply broadcasting general information, more efforts involving “pulling” or “networking” strategies can lead to more bilateral means of communication. Meanwhile, its efforts to integrate social media into problem solving revealed an approach that incorporated a useful framework for institutional technology adoption. Although this agency appeared to be undertaking certain challenges within the first two stages of adoption, it has made conscious efforts to mitigate these issues by standardizing and institutionalizing some of its social media protocols through policy adoption. Further implementation of policy standards can buffer this agency from potential issues pertaining to public records retention and information inconsistencies.

While this case provides insight regarding public agencies’ use of social media in service delivery, caution must be used in the assessment of these findings. As with any case study, limitations exist through issues regarding the

generalization of the results. The issues and findings discussed here are specific to the City of Austin and the Austin Police Department. While Austin within itself faces challenges common to other communities, its political culture and community philosophies may be unique from other communities of its size and even within its own state. The general political make-up of Texas is traditionally conservative, therefore deeming it a “red” state. However, Austin itself separates from most other Texas communities in that this city has more liberal political views, deeming it a “blue” city. This culture of political liberalism provides an atmosphere unique to Austin that may not be found within other cities, especially those in its surrounding area. Therefore, the results brought forth within this case may not translate to other agencies within regarded peer cities. That coupled with the fact that Austin is considered a “college town” that is home to a major university that brings forth an exceptionally high college student population, also provides a dynamic unique to this area regarding the public integration of social media. Nevertheless, this small sample can provide an illustration of the potential that agencies have to incorporate innovative uses of social media to not only solve community problems, but also forge partnerships that could truly connect agencies with the citizens that they serve. Perhaps the lessons and recommendations drawn from this study can assist practitioners as they further their endeavors to integrate social media into their organizations to enhance their functions and innovatively distribute and market their services.

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